Think a Project is too Big for Small Business – Think Again

Let's talk. Yes, on the face of it one might presume to rely upon large businesses to complete high dollar and/or complex information technology (IT) projects without considering other firms because the IT majors are reputed to have the resources as they're … well … big. It is true that large businesses often do a fine job on such projects because they are used to doing them (know-how) and can often readily provide the resources, making it seem like the path of least resistance. However, before writing off a small business from such an opportunity it begs the questions about what is, and what isn't, within the means of small businesses, and what is it that would inspire confidence in the capabilities of small businesses to successfully complete a project. GSA's Small Business (SB) Governmentwide Acquisition Contracts (GWACs) Center is aware of these interests and can help you answer the questions. Large businesses are not the only ones who have experience with such projects or the means to assemble the resources to handle them – in many cases SBs can too! So, let's tackle some of the common misconceptions about small businesses.

Where do small businesses come from? Well, the ones on GSA's SB GWACs for IT services and IT services-based solutions, i.e. 8(a) STARS – a GWAC with 8(a) certified firms, VETS – a GWAC with service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses and COMMITS NexGen – a GWAC with small businesses, are run by people who used to do big projects for the IT majors, the Armed Forces and other organizations. These are people who have the drive that has led them to create or join small businesses. These entrepreneurs have established businesses where they have the freedom and control to exercise their initiative and practice personal customer service, where decisions makers are immediately available to customers, free from the bureaucracy of larger organizations. What is a large business? In many cases, large businesses are, in essence, a collection (akin to a team) of smaller business units welded together after mergers and acquisitions - often of previously small businesses.

Now let's talk about another issue – resources. Sometimes small businesses may be overlooked for high dollar and/or complex projects because it is assumed they would not have the necessary bench strength.

By way of comparison, it is useful to consider a typical vignette about how large businesses engage potential projects. Sure, they are going to put together a team to meet with you and discuss requirements. That's typically their full-time outreach and capture management team that is proficient at saying the right things, and often are not the people that would do the work. In that model a big business will have to later assemble a team from existing in-house personnel and/or hire some folks to work on your project and/or access their subcontractors (often small businesses) to do the work.

Small businesses too will assemble a team to meet with you and discuss requirements, however oftentimes this will consist of senior company officers and/or the project manager. Small businesses on GSA's small business GWACs are adept at undertaking work at a range of dollar amounts (the largest task order exceeds $200M, while many more are at various lower dollar amounts) and both complex

work consisting of consolidating multiple previous projects (which does not require a bundling justification under these GWACs) and also less complex work. The small business GWACs were designed to support scalable teaming arrangements which promote the prime contractors doing their fair share of the work on each task order by utilizing an optimal mix of their in-house bench strength, while leveraging corporate reach back to meet the scale of the opportunity and ensure smooth transitions. Each GWAC's Ordering Guide addresses this matter under the Subcontracting heading. In effect, while each SB prime contractor is accountable to ensure they add significant value to every task order, they are able to utilize strategic subcontractors as force multipliers.

So, how do you check out these SBs? The SB GWAC Center encourages consideration of and advocates for its' small businesses by promoting and supporting non-binding capabilities requests that allow agencies to consider the benefits of using small businesses for task orders for IT services and IT services-based solutions, enabling review of each firm's core competencies, bench strength and scalability. The SB GWAC Center has tips on how to make the capabilities statement request process meaningful, including how to get the most out of the process. We would appreciate the opportunity to support you as you explore the potential of these very highly qualified firms, to include not only the considerations mentioned above, but also security clearances, FISMA compliance, EVMS credentials, ISO certifications, CMM certifications and more. If you're dubious when you try this we think you will either be pleasantly surprised, while if you're optimistic when you try this we believe your optimism will be validated.

For more information please contact the 8(a) STARS team at "8astars@gsa.gov", the VETS GWAC team at "vetsgwac@gsa.gov" and the COMMITS NexGen team at "commits@gsa.gov".